DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 273 633 SP 028 050

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TITLE An Investigative Analysis of High Dropout Rates in Louisiana Schools.
INSTITUTION McNeese State Coll., Lake Charles, La.
PUB DATE [85]
NOTE 23p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Dropout Characteristics; Dropout Prevention; *High Risk Students; High Schools; *High School Students; Psychological Needs; Student Motivation; Teacher Education
IDENTIFIERS *Louisiana

ABSTRACT

This research project was conducted by McNeese State University College of Education in the fall of 1985 to analyze the problem of high school dropouts in Louisiana. Supervisors of the 64 school parishes in the state's educational system received a questionnaire and were asked to make copies and randomly select at least ten high school dropout students in their respective parishes to complete the survey. Fifty-three parishes participated, with a return of 261 questionnaires. The results of the study indicate an overwhelming need for teachers to develop an improved level of sensitivity toward students' emotional needs as well as academic needs. There is a need for the educational system to prepare future teachers with strategies to deal effectively with the dropout problem by providing information on the characteristics of high risk students. A copy of the questionnaire is appended and an item-by-item analyses of responses is presented. (JD)

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AN INVESTIGATIVE ANALYSIS OF HIGH DROPOUT RATES IN LOUISIANA SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

The increasing high school dropout rate is a devastating problem throughout the United States of America. This issue is of concern to professionals in all areas of the educational arena, because it has an influence on the development of American population. In order to find a solution for the problem, it will require the united effort of the educational, political and economical sectors of this country to join forces in addressing the factors causing this problem.

This research project was conducted by McNeese State University's College of Education in the fall of 1985. The supervisors of the sixty-four school parishes in the state of Louisiana's educational system received a questionnaire (appendix I) and were asked to make copies and randomly select at least ten high school dropout students in their respective parish to complete the survey, and return the data for inclusion in this study. The response was remarkable, fifty-three parishes participated, with a return of two hundred and sixty-one (261) questionnaires.

The results of this study indicates the overwhelming evidences of a need for teachers to develop an improved level of sensitivity toward students' emotional needs as well as academic needs. There is a need for the educational system to prepare future teachers with strategies to deal effectively with the dropout problem by providing information on the characteristics of high risk students.

If classroom teachers are expected to assume the responsibility of providing the incentive for students to aspire earning a high school diploma, which must be initiated in the early elementary grades, the institution of higher education will have to provide knowledge and instructions dealing with this topic in depth to it's candidates in teacher education.

Thus, the state of Louisiana needs a descriptive program stemming from the state department streaming down to the elementary school curriculum, to alleviate this devastating state-wide situation.

AN INVESTIGATIVE ANALYSIS OF HIGH DROPOUT RATES IN LOUISIANA SCHOOLS

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In 1972, a report was published by the National Public School Relations Association which stated "the federal government maintains an appreciable level of funding for costly 'dropout' prevention programs but has displayed no inclination to expand it drastically." Additionally, it was reported that the researchers called the problem of school "dropouts" education's most unyielding quandary. It continues to state, "The decision to leave may often be detected even in the early years of elementary school. Among the signs are: (a) inability to read at grade level, (b) rebellious attitude toward teachers, classroom disruptions and emotional disturbances, (c) frequent absenteeism, and (d) a pattern of failure in school work."

Professor James S. Coleman of John Hopkins University has stated that the most glaring shortcoming in American Education today continues to be the lag in essential learning skills. The school system and the way we teach are the main causes of high school dropouts. A recent article in the Chicago Medical Journal discussed the high school dropout problem, stating that "almost ninety percent of all able-bodied people on welfare today are the high school dropouts of yesterday." There is a need for the educational system to prepare future teachers with strategies to deal with the dropout problem by providing information on the characteristics of high risk students.

If classroom teachers are to assume the responsibility of providing the incentive for students to aspire earning a high school

diploma, the institution of higher education will have to provide knowledge and instructions dealing with the topic of high school dropouts to its candidates in teacher education. There is a need for a descriptive program stemming from the national office and streaming down to the high school curriculum. The following diagram analyzes the various components that should be comprised with the solution oriented description.

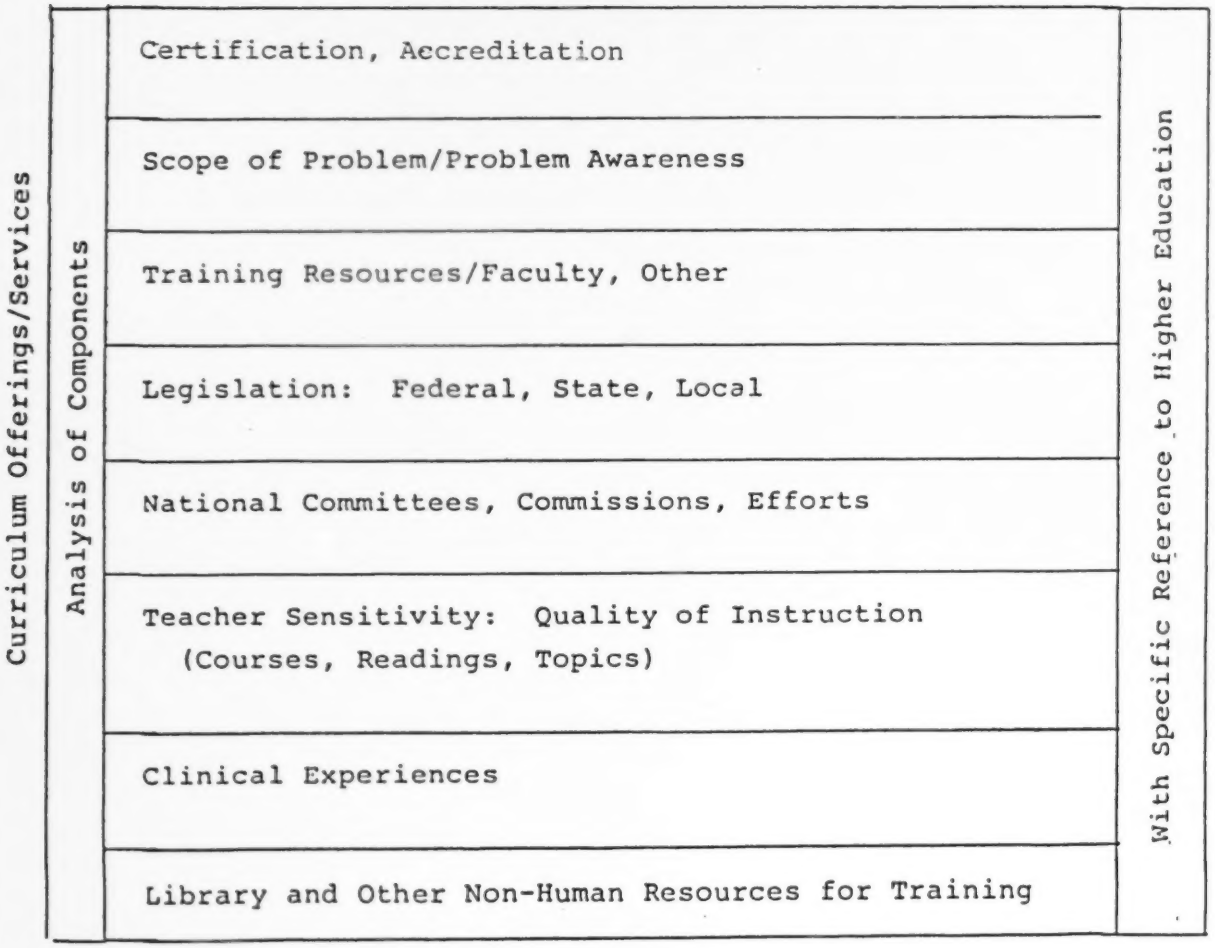

Diagram A

Teacher Preparation on Alleviation of High School Dropouts in the Louisiana Educational System.

There are young people in this country who are crying out for help from the school system to provide a life description or guidance by which to follow to become contributing citizens. According to the FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin 1985, there were approximately three million runaways in 1983 alone. It is estimated that 10,000 young people runaway from home daily and become victimized by national crime in metropolitan cities throughout the United States.

The educational system will have to develop a policy to organize a program that will compensate for the lack of home training of which young people in this society are deprived. There is a need to help students to develop a sense of self-confidence, self-worth, and a positive self-concept. These students need to develop coping skills to enable them to function effectively despite life's daily obstacles.

In the educational system there is much emphasis placed on cognitive domain which included externally controlled learning. The techniques used are basically punishment, rewards, deadlines, and surveillance. This kind of approach may hinder conceptual learning processes. The teacher training program must provide future teachers with strategies to take their students perspectives into account in the total school curriculum.

Students at all levels acknowledge the need for structures and constraints. Nevertheless, they still want some flexibility and choices. They are eager to learn provided they can follow their own interest. Many students experience elementary school as synonymous with failure. They need constant reinforcement and nurturing from kindergarten to high school graduation.

METHOD

This study was an analysis of the problem of high school dropouts in the state of Louisiana. There was a specific effort to ascertain information on the extent of instruction and training of teachers in the areas of school retention, beginning in kindergarten to build a durable foundation that will extend to high school graduation.

Data was collected through a questionnaire. The data was classified, analyzed, and summarized to draw inferences for a solution to a critical statewide problem. An overriding aim of the study has been the ultimate alleviation of the high rate of high school dropouts in Louisiana.

The sample population included in the study consists of the dropout students from the fifty-three parishes in the state of Louisiana.

America has earned global recognition as the most outstanding nation in the world. This status has been acquired by an effective educational effort, strong political policies, and a productive economy. In order to retain this world position there is a need to give special attention to the critical problems of the enormous high school dropout rate across the nation, the region, and within this state.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

There is a major concern about the increasing rate of high school dropouts by educational leaders, professionals in all fields, and the general public. According to James C. Bennett, it is estimated that thirty-five percent (35%) of all students who start the

first grade do not complete their high school education. A definition of dropout used in many surveys is, "any student who leaves school prior to high school graduation for any reason except for his/her death." The important fact is that in the state of Louisiana, the high school dropout rate was 21.8 percent in 1983 according to the U.S. Department of Labor Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics in the December 1983 Bulletin 2192. This problem has serious consequences of a negative nature in the following areas: (a) The Labor Market, (b) Delinquency, (c) Drug Abuse, and (d) Crime Rates.

Ida Birdsall, in her book Potential Dropouts - Why?, states that the number one problem in the American school system today is the dropouts, the students who can not make it in school, who lack the drive and ability to continue their studies, who through frustrations can only disturb a class as they seeks the attention impossible to get through classroom achievement. As a result of this situation, the student quits and takes to the streets and gets involved in criminal mischief. This is evident in that research that indicates 95% of all adult felons in juvenile court have criminal records have not finished high school. Half of the crimes in this country are committed by youngsters who are not old enough to vote. One could draw the conclusion that whatever we as educators or supporters of the educational process have done has been a miserable failure according to Senator Birch Bayth of Indiana in the Family Weekly, September, 1973.

Item I of the questionnaire provided a blank for indication of the sex of the subject. Item II asked for the age. Item III provided five categories for marital status. Item IV asked for the highest grade completed in high school. Item V asked for the parent's (both mother's and father's) educational level. Item VI asked for parent's level of income. Reasons for leaving school, Item VII provided fourteen (14) categories. Item VIII asked for the factors that may have encouraged a student to remain in school and attain his/her high school diploma. This item was divided into thirteen (13) divisions. Item IX asked about attendance in adult education to work toward a G.E.D. The final item asked the participants to indicate how many times he had transferred in school.

RESULTS

1) Sex: Male _____ Female _____

Response	Number	Percentage
Male	141	54
Female	120	46
TOTAL	261	100

Table I indicated the number of male and female subjects who responded to the questionnaire. One hundred and forty-one (54%) of the participants who responded are males and one hundred and twenty (46%) are females.

2) Age (Range)

Response	Number	Percentage
Ages 16-43	261	100

Table II, Question II shows the age range of the participants. Two hundred and sixty-one (100%) of the participants ages ranged from 16-43 years of age.

3) Marital Status

Response	Number	Percentage
Married	52	20
Separated	10	4
Single	191	73
Divorced	6	2
Widow/Widower	2	1
TOTAL	261	100

Table III, Question III shows the marital status of the two hundred and sixty-one participants surveyed. Fifty-two (20%) were married while ten (4%) were separated. One hundred and ninety-one (73%) were single, six (2%) were divorced, and two (1%) were widowed.

4) Highest grade completed. (Grade Range)

Response	Number	Percentage
6th - 8th	87	33
9th - 12th	174	67
TOTAL	261	100

Table IV, Question IV shows the highest grade which was completed by the participants. All one hundred and sixty-one dropped out of school in grades 6th through 12th.

5) Parent's Educational Level

Response	Range	Number	Percentage
Mother	1st - 8th	92	35
	9th - 12th	120	46
	Higher	49	19
	TOTAL	261	100
Father	1st - 8th	134	10
	9th - 12th	89	34
	Higher	38	14
	TOTAL	261	100

Table V, Question V shows the educational level of the mothers and fathers as reported by the participants. In the case of the

mothers, the education ranged from the 1st - 8th or 9th - 12th grade. In the case of the fathers, the education ranged from the 6th - 12th grade.

6) Reason for leaving school. (It should be noted that since the participants chose more than one category for numbers six and seven, the total will be 350 and 287 respectively instead of the total number of participants which is 261.)

Response	Number	Percentage
1-Frustrated from Failure in Subject Areas	57	16
2-Bored	51	15
3-Needed a Job	37	11
4-Military	14	4
5-Family Responsibilities	12	3
6-Discipline Problems	34	10
7-School Pressure	21	6
8-Peer Pressure	11	3
9-Parent Pressure	9	3
10-Teacher Pressure	21	6
11-Feeling Isolated	14	4
12-Suspension/Expulsion	47	13
13-Health Condition	15	4
14-Marriage	7	2
TOTAL	350	100

Table VI, Question VI shows that of the total respondents, fifty-seven (16%) left school because they were frustrated from failure in subject areas. Fifty-one (15%) reported they were bored. Thirty-seven (11%) indicated needing a job was their reason. To join the military was given by fourteen (4%) and family responsibilities was given by twelve (3%). Thirty-four (10%) reported that discipline problems were the reasons for them to drop out of school. Fourteen (4%) felt isolated and forty-seven (13%) had been suspended or expelled for various reasons. Health conditions were cited by fifteen (4%) while seven (2%) left because of marriage.

7) Factors that may have encouraged the student to remain in school and attain his/her high school diploma.

Response	Number	Percentage
1-Revelant Courses	18	6
2-Individualized Instruction	14	5
3-Student Input in Curriculum	11	4
4-Better Teacher-Student Rapport	37	13
5-Effective Counseling	41	14
6-Extensive Extra-Curricular Programs	19	7
7-Adequate Finances	17	6
8-Appropriate Peer Interaction	14	5
9-Adequate Intellectual Challenge	15	5
10-More Faculty Care and Concern	29	10
11-Quality Teaching	16	6
12-Caring Attitude of Faculty and Staff	27	9
13-Less Restrictive Rules and Regulations	29	10
TOTAL	287	100

Table VII, Question VII shows the factors that may have encouraged the participants to remain in school and attain their high school diploma. Eighteen (6%) believed that courses should have been more relevant. Fourteen (5%) thought the instruction should have been more individualized. Eleven (4%) felt there should have been more student input while thirty-seven (13%) thought the teacher-student rapport should have been better. It should be noted that effective counseling was the area cited by most - forty-one (14%). Nineteen (7%) of the participants felt the extra curricula program should be more extensive. Seventeen (6%) thought they needed more finance. Appropriate peer interaction was cited by fourteen (5%) of the participants and more adequate intellectual challenge seemed to be needed by fifteen (5%). Twenty-nine (10%) reported that there should have been more faculty

High school dropouts may be stemming from several sources with students in two unique categories: one group is frustrated due to the lack of a strong learning foundation and the other group is bored based on a lack of motivation.

The frustration is based on the demands of the school system such as unorganized lessons, unrealistic teacher or parent expectation for performance, teacher inconsistency of rules and regulations, favoritism, and lack of interest in student's concern. There is a feeling of defeat and they are overwhelmed with pressure coming from all directions, so the only solution available is to get out of an uncomfortable situation by dropping out of school. These young people are faced with an even larger problem trying to get employment without any marketable skills. The outcome in many cases is an increase in national crime and poverty.

The teachers need to become committed to the teaching profession, so that they will work to develop the sensitivity that is a necessity to show students they care and to set levels that encourage achievement. To accomplish this, it will take the cooperation of the total faculty and staff. (Evan R. Whittington,1981).

On the other hand, students who are suffering from boredom may be gifted, or the lessons are below their academic level of comprehension. The situation may be that the students are not motivated to learn because the content of the lessons is not relevant to their daily lives.

The institution of higher education has to assume the responsibility of providing teaching strategies in an effort to help teachers improve high school students retention. Dr. Robert J. Martin

suggested in his 1980 book, Teaching Through Encouragement, steps teachers may take to motivate students through encouragment. This method helps the students to change their views of self, others, and the world by:

Changing Self-Image. Students (and teachers) who feel discouraged typically have a poor self-image. They don't like themselves very much. They feel they're stupid, bad, ugly, or incompetent, and they feel that everyone else must agree with them in their self-evaluations. Students who think poorly of themselves are unlikely to change their attitudes or behavior. Attempting to change people by focusing on their weaknesses or inferiority seldom works; focusing on weaknesses reinforces feeling of worthless or inferiority. A positive self-image can best be encouraged by focusing on strengths.

Changing Attitudes. Encouragement is a process of helping to change self-defeating attitudes and behavior. Students who have self-defeating attitudes may feel that they can't win, that everyone is unfair, or that no one likes them. As a result, they tend to provoke the behavior that they expect but don't want. A child who expects rejection mistrusts others and questions their motives, inviting rejection. A student who wants to be liked so much that he or she plays the class clown invites others to laugh at him or her rather than accept him or her as a friend. A child who feels that he or she is treated unfairly by adults provokes power struggles in which adults feel forced to punish him or her.

Changing Behavior. Encouragement is a process of helping others to change their behavior. When behavior changes, self-images and attitudes are also likely to change. Conversely, when attitudes and self-images change, behavior is also likely to change.

Encouragement and Responsibility. Encouragement and responsibility are linked. Students who learn to accept responsiblity for their behavior experience a sense of power to direct their own lives that gives them the confidence to learn and to cooperate with others. As students begin to change in ways that help them to learn and to cooperate, they feel encouraged by their success.

Look for Strengths. Particularly with difficult students, it is easy to see only the negative side, only the problems. We are aware of deficits and problems because they make life difficult for us. It may be necessary to take a few minutes to think of a student's strengths. The more students seem unable to help themselves, the more necessary it becomes to focus on strengths and to avoid unnecessary dependence.

Take Students Seriously. The basis of encouraging others is to take them seriously. There is no substitute for sincere interest. Without a willingness to become involved with students as human beings, the practices suggested in books and articles on effective teaching become empty exercises.

Take an Interest. Taking an interest in what students are thinking and doing is often a much more powerful form of encouragement than praise.

- Take time to listen and observe.
- Re-structure class time when necessary so that you do have time to listen and observe. A teacher who spends most of the time lecturing or correcting papers or worksheets doesn't have time to just watch. Observing students may seem to some teachers liking sitting and doing nothing, but often more can be learned by simply watching students than can be learned from hours of testing.
- When you're taking others seriously, you're trying to learn as well as teach. Find out what students think and what their attitudes are. Even if you know more than they do about something they're interested in, be careful about giving help until help is wanted.

Look for Mistakes that Make Sense. Mistakes are often the result of a logical, though incorrect, approach to solving a problem. Teachers who do not realize when a mistake makes sense are likely to discourage students from thinking.

Build on a Student Interest. Teachers are sometimes unsure about when it is worthwhile to change a lesson and deal with something that comes up on the spur of the moment.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study was conducted to investigate the severity of the high dropout problem in the state of Louisiana. The findings indicate that the situation is so widespread that developing solution is now a necessity. The colleges and universities should unite their efforts with other professionals from the private sector to provide a solution to this problem which will cover the spectrum from kindergarten through graduation. The American teacher becomes partly responsible for the reduction of the high dropout rate in this state. The Louisiana teachers are committed to motivating children to learn by providing stimulation for educational success.

care and concern for them. Sixteen (6%) questioned the quality of teaching. Twenty-seven (5%) reported the faculty and staff needed a more caring attitude, while twenty-nine (10%) reported they thought the rules and regulations should have been less restrictive.

8) Has the student attended Adult Education Class?

Response	Number	Percentage
Yes	31	12
No	71	27
No Response	159	61
TOTAL	261	100

Table VIII, Question VIII shows how many participants responded to the question of how many have attended adult education classes. Thirty-one (12%) reported Yes while seventy-one (27%) reported No. One hundred and fifty-nine (6%) of the participants did not respond to the question.

9) Does the student plan to enroll in Adult Education to work toward his/her G.E.D.?

Response	Number	Percentage
Yes	61	23
No	24	9
No Response	176	68
TOTAL	261	100

Table IX, Question IX shows that sixty-one (23%) of the participants intends to seek their G.E.D. Twenty-four (9%) indicated they have no plans to earn a diploma through the Adult Education Program. One hundred and seventy-six (68%) of the participants did not respond to the item.

DISCUSSION

On the basis of the findings in this study, the following conclusions are drawn about the factors that contributes to the increasing high school dropout rate in the state of Louisiana.

1) The majority of the participants were males.

2) There is a broad range of high school dropouts (16-43 years old) returning to adult education, which indicates they have realized that employment is limited for people without a high school diploma.

3) A large percentage of the dropout students were single and responsible for their own livelihood, requiring financial obligation of the individual or of the state.

4) The large percentage of the students dropped out of school before entering high school. This show evidences that the problem must be addressed early in the students' educational experience.

5) This item reflects the family background of the students participating in the study which has an influence on the dreams for the future and an educational aspiration of an individual.

6) The information derived from this item focused on the reason for leaving school, even though the participants were allowed to select several categories, the vast majority answered as one of their choices number one, frustration from failure in subject areas. This reflected a lack of self-confidence and security in the average school dropout.

7) A large percentage of the participants indicated a need for an improved student counseling program and better teacher-student rapport. This identifies the need for a great concentration on meeting students humanistic need.

8) Many of the participants have plans to return to adult education classes, which help the individual correct a pass mistake, unfortunately, this is costing the state more money to fund one person's education twice.

9) This item is similar to the above item and the majority of the participants do plan to earn a graduate equivalence diploma.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Specific courses or workshops focusing on the humanistic approach to teaching be provided. This will help educators to become cognizant of the importance of teachers being sensitive to students' emotional needs.
2. Develop a program to improve the parent-teacher relationship, by encouraging parents to unite their efforts with that of the school faculty, in order to provide an incentive for students to aspire a high school diploma.
3. Developing a liaison program including the teacher, the counselor, the parent, and the student providing a network for open lines of communication with information the student may use as a support system during those critical times in his/her educational experience.
4. The educational system needs curricula that concentrates on alleviating the pressure on students produced by the fear of failure. This has a devastating influence on learning process.
5. Develop an awareness program to enhance positive attitudes and mutual respect among parents, students, and the school faculty, to enable this educational system to evolve into all it is meant to be.
6. Students should be encouraged to enroll in relevant and meaningful courses. Stereotypes based on tradition should be deleted and course selection should be based on interest, graduation requirements, and usefulness.

7. The school should provide meaningful extra curricula programs for students who are potential dropouts. These students should be encouraged by counselors, teachers, administrators, and parents to become goal oriented and aware of the procedures to "belong" to a desired club or group. It should be noted here that the "no pass, no play" rule can be used to give the potential dropout the incentive for meeting the stated academic requirements for membership.

A P P E N D I X I

Q U E S T I O N N A I R E

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This is a completely anonymous questionnaire. It is designed to secure information on the problem of High School Dropouts in the five parish area served by McNeese State University. Please Check ( ) each space considered appropriate to describe your situation.

I. SEX: Male ____ Female ____ II. AGE: _____

III. MARITAL STATUS:

Married_____ Divorced_____
Separated____ Widow or Widower____
Single_____

IV. HIGHEST GRADE COMPLETED IN HIGH SCHOOL: _____

V. PARENT'S EDUCATIONAL LEVEL: Mother _____
Father _____

VI. PARENT'S LEVEL OF INCOME:
0 - 10,000 ___ 21,000 - 30,000 ___
11,000 - 20,000 ___ 31,000 - ABOVE ___

VII. REASON FOR LEAVING SCHOOL:

1)____Frustrated from Failure in Subject Areas.
2)____Bored
3)____Needed a Job
4)____Military
5)____Family Responsibilities
6)____Discipline Problems
7)____School Pressure
8)____Peer Pressure
9)____Parent Pressure
10)____Teacher Pressure
11)____Feeling Isolated
12)____Suspension/Expulsion
13)____Health Condition
14)____Marriage
15)____Absenteeism

VIII. CHECK FACTORS THAT MAY HAVE ENCOURAGED YOU TO REMAIN IN SHCOOL AND ATTAIN YOUR HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA:

1)____Relevant Courses
2)____Individualized Instruction
3)____Student Input in Curriculum
4)____Better Teacher-Student Rapport
5)____Effective Counseling
6)____Extensive Extra-Curricular Programs
7)____Adequate Finances
8)____Appropriate Peer-Interaction
9)____Adequate Intellectual Challenge
10)____More Faculty Care and Concern
11)____Quality Teaching
12)____Caring Attitude of Faculty and Staff
13)____Less Restrictive Rules and Regulations

IX. HAVE YOU ATTENDED ADULT EDUCATION CLASS? YES____ NO____

X. DO YOU PLAN TO ENROLL IN ADULT EDUCATION TO WORK TOWARD YOUR G.E.D.?

YES____ NO____

XI. HOW MANY SCHOOL TRANSFERS DID YOU MAKE IN YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE? _____

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